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ABSTRACT

Government policy on public support for private schools in Sweden, the United States, Australia, Hong Kong, The Netherlands, France and Malta, and Canada is reviewed. In Sweden virtually all schools are government schools funded by local and national grants; only a handful of private schools exist and they receive no government funds. The United States directly funds only government-operated elementary and secondary schools. Australia's constitution contains a clause forbidding the government from establishing a religion, but in recent years the courts have approved government funding for private schools. Recently in Hong Kong government support has been extended to private schools that must abide by the Code of Aid (no discrimination on the basis of religion in hiring or dismissal of staff). The Netherlands shifted from a government system of public schools before 1920 to a system of predominantly private schools that are fully government funded. In France and Malta the government recently made demands that could have placed private schools under government control. Massive demonstration in France forced withdrawal of the plan; in Malta it is still unresolved and private schools have closed in protest. Ontario and other provinces of Canada are unusual in that private schools are operated by the government. (MD)

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PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CATHOLIC AND DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS:

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE*

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The Premier's announcement in June of this year that the Government of Ontario would extend its financial support for separate schools to include grades 11 to 13 stirred interest in the general issue of state support for Catholic and other religious schools. The purpose of this brief paper is to outline the arrangements for the support of Catholic and denominational schools in other provinces and countries.

To begin, it is useful to distinguish between government provision (or funding) and government production. When government provides a good or service, it provides the funds necessary to pay for the good or service, but it may or may not produce the good or service. For example, school buildings are typically produced by private businesses, though paid for out of government funds. When government produces a good or service, on the other hand, it may or may not charge for this service. The postal service, for example, is expected to be self-supporting.

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Thus, when we talk of government and education, four combinations are possible:

1) government funding and government production
2) government funding and private production
3) private funding and government production
4) private funding and private production

In Ontario, the first and fourth situations apply to education. That is, through its public and separate school boards (which are elected bodies regulated by The Education Act) government provides and produces education. As well, private schools exist and are privately funded. At the same time, all government operated schools are free and there is no direct government support of private schools, so situations 2 and 3 do not apply.

However, in other jurisdictions, situation 2 (government funding and private production) is the most common arrangement as far as Catholic and denominational education is concerned.

The variation in arrangements for Catholic and denominational education in other countries is tremendous. In each country, the nation's particular history, especially as it concerns the relationship of the state and Church, is of paramount importance. In each case, the status of religion and, by inference, religious schools is defined in the nation's constitution. A sense of the variation in arrangements can be obtained by considering several nations: Sweden, the U.S., The Netherlands, Hong Kong, Australia, France and Malta.

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Sweden. Sweden is of interest in that virtually all schools are government schools operated by local municipalities and funded by local and national grants.[1] There are a handful of private preparatory schools, which receive no government funds, and no Catholic schools, for there are virtually no Catholics. Over 95% of Sweden's population support the established Lutheran Church.

Sweden's educational situation is closely tied to its religious history. With the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, which in effect declared a nation's religion was the religion of its Prince, Sweden became Protestant. At the same time, the King delegated most matters pertaining to education to the Lutheran Church. In the 1950s, education remained the concern of the Minister of Education and Ecclesiastic Affairs.

During their 40 year reign from the 1930s to the mid-1970s, the Social Democrats in Sweden emphasized the egalitarian aims of education, transferring elite national secondary schools (which traced their origin to the Cathedral schools of the Middle Ages) to local municipalities, and ensured the facilities at public schools were superior to those of the private preparatory schools.

United States. The U.S. is another country that directly funds only government operated elementary and secondary schools. However, in contrast to Sweden, the U.S. has many private schools, many of which are Roman Catholic parochial schools. As well, increasing numbers of evangelical Christian schools there reflect a loss in commitment to the "common school" and numerous attempts

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have been made to provide at least indirect aid in the form of tax deductions to private schools.

To date, the U.S. Constitution and its interpretation by the U.S. Supreme Court have served as barriers to the public funding of private religious schools, though a recent decision in favour of a Minnesota law extending tax deductions to parents of children in both public and private schools may reflect a change in this situation.

Australia. Though Australia's constitution also contains a clause forbidding the government to establish a religion (or to interfere with the free practice thereof), its Courts in recent years have approved government measures for funding private schools, including Catholic and denominational (e.g., Anglican and Baptist) schools.[2]

The current support system for private schools consists of equalization grants to schools based on a School's Recurrent Resource Index (SRRI) in which the private resources available to a school are expressed as a percentage of the total resources required to operate at standard government school costs. Currently, schools are placed in three categories, and grants range from about 15% to 40% of costs. Under this system, private Catholic schools have been treated as a group (rather than individually), and have generally received the highest rate of grant.

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Government schools, it should be noted, are operated directly by Australian state departments of education; there are no elected school boards.

Hong Kong. Traditionally, the centrepiece of the Colonial system of education in Hong Kong was the prestigious government schools, particularly those offering secondary education. There were relatively few places available in these government schools and many students were forced to attend inferior private schools. In recent years, government support has been extended to increasing numbers of private schools, including those operated by the Roman Catholic Church, other religious groups and clans. When a private school accepts assistance, it then must abide by The Code of Aid. Of particular note is the allocation of secondary school pupils to schools on the basis of achievement, with the best pupils allocated to government and aided schools.

Under the Code of Aid, private schools theoretically cannot discriminate on the basis of religion in hiring or dismissing staff. Yet, this loss of autonomy has not proven severe, whereas the aid has apparently saved many schools from closing and raised their teachers' salaries to the level of teachers in government schools.

The Netherlands. The Netherlands is of particular interest in that its educational system shifted from a predominantly government system of public schools before The Primary Education Act of 1920 to a system of predominantly private schools today.[3]

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Specifically, in 1901, 69 percent of all primary students were enrolled in public schools; by 1959, the percentage had declined to 28 percent. In the same year, 27 percent of all students were enrolled in Protestant schools (representing a number of different sects), 35 percent were in Roman Catholic schools, and 2 percent in schools classed as "other". Private schools are fully funded by the local government and teachers' salaries are comparable in both the public and private sectors. Students enrolled in the public schools, however, must have the option of enrolling in religion courses of their choice.

The government of the Netherlands is restricted by the country's constitution in terms of its authority over private schools. In practice, it only sets the conditions under which subsidies are granted. "The freedom of the direction of private education must be respected, especially in the choice of the methods of tuition and in the appointment of the teaching staff."[4] As a result of this, the private sector of the educational system has proven unresponsive to government policies aimed at adapting schooling to current needs, including the integration of post-war immigrants from its former overseas colonies into the social structure of the nation.

France and Malta. The governments of both France and Malta have recently confronted private Catholic schools in their nations with demands that would place these schools under more direct government control. In both cases the governments in question were dominated by socialist parties concerned with the elite

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nature of these schools and the degree to which they serve to reinforce the social class structure of these nations. That is, in these nations, private Roman Catholic schools play the conservative role played by private grammar schools in the U.K. and elsewhere.

In the case of France, the government policy would have required that teachers in the private Catholic schools become civil servants of the national government, as is the case with teachers in the public system. After massive public demonstrations against this proposed policy, the government withdrew its plans.

The situation in Malta is still unresolved. Here, the government has forbidden private schools to continue to levy tuition and, in protest, the schools have shut their doors. While the government argues that the schools are elite, school administrators claim that no needy student is required to pay tuition. The Roman Catholic Church has actively supported the schools' position.

Conclusion

The issue of the proper relationship between Church and state, as far as education is concerned, is found in all nations. The resolution of the issue is never easy and always involves fundamental constitutional questions.

Ontario, and the other provinces of Canada with separate school systems, are unusual in that their Roman Catholic separate schools

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are operated by publicly elected trustees; that is, they are operated by government rather than by the Church, teaching orders within the Church, or private boards of governments. In part, this unique solution is due to the institutional framework of locally elected school boards, unique in North America, within which the issue has been addressed.

One view, then, of the "extension" or "completion" of the Ontario separate school system from a K-10 system to a K-13 system, is that it is a move by government to forestall the further development and emplacement of a system of elite private Catholic secondary schools that would remove effective control of Catholic education from government. In these terms it would seem that the move is very progressive, at least from an international perspective, in that it will help to ensure Ontario will not develop the type of class-based educational system that has been repeatedly identified as a social problem in many nations.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Rolland G. Paulston, Educational Change in Sweden: Planning and Accepting the Comprehensive School Reforms. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1968). See also, Leon Boucher, Tradition and Change in Swedish Education. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982).

2. Joel D. Sherman, "Public Finance of Private Schools: Observations from Abroad", in Public Dollars for Private Schools by Thomas James and H.M. Levin, Eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

3. Netherlands Ministry of Education, Arts and Sciences, Dutch Schoolsystem. (The Hague: Netherlands Government Information Service, 1960).

4. Ibid., p. 9.